

What the Heck is Nonviolent Communication (NVC)?

Nonviolent communication, also known as “compassionate communication,” is a communication theory developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg in the 1960s.

It is based on the idea that all human beings are compassionate by nature and only resort to violence, or behavior that harms others, when they don’t recognize more effective strategies for meeting their needs.

NVC proposes that if people can identify their needs, the needs of others, and the feelings that surround those needs, harmony can be achieved.

In the words of Marshall Rosenberg, PhD,

“Most of us have been educated from birth to compete, judge, demand and diagnose – to think and communicate in terms of what is “right” and “wrong” with people. We express our feelings in terms of what another person has “done to us.” We struggle to understand what we want or need in the moment, and how to effectively ask for what we want without using unhealthy demands, threats or coercion. What others may do may be a stimulus of our feelings, but not the cause.”

While as a society we may not consider the way we talk to be “violent,” words often lead to hurt and pain, whether for others or ourselves.

NVC has been coined “a process of communication,” or a “language of compassion.”

Fun fact: the term “nonviolence,” is known as “ahimsa,” which is a Hindi word that actually translates to “the state of the heart that has no enemies.”

What is the power of NVC?

- NVC guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others.
- We learn to identify and clearly articulate what we are concretely wanting in any given situation.
- NVC replaces our old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking ourselves and others in the face of criticism and judgment.
- NVC minimizes defensiveness, resistance, and violent reactions and fosters respect, attentiveness, and empathy with ourselves and others.